Special Operations as a Warfighting Function?

by John P.J. DeRosa

MG Bennet Sacolick, commander of the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, and BG Wayne Grigsby, director of the U.S. Army Mission Command Center of Excellence, recently reflected on the ongoing Army "campaign of learning" and offered their insights into Special Operation Forces and conventional-force integration. In particular, they have placed special emphasis on the introduction of the "human domain" and a "seventh warfighting function" to Army doctrine.[1]

They suggest the human domain is an outward focus of the environment beyond the interrelated dimensions of the information environment. They further suggest that the human domain is contrasted with the inward focus of the moral, physical and cognitive components of the individual in what Joint doctrine describes as the human dimension.[2] A doctrine purist may bristle at the convergence of these ideas, and indeed this idea may not survive the doctrinal change recommendation; however, it lays the groundwork for their other recommendation: a new, yet unnamed, seventh WfF.

The human domain, as offered by Sacolick and Grigsby, represents the "totality of the physical, cultural and social environments that influence human behavior. The influence is to the extent that success of any military operation or campaign depends on the application of unique capabilities that are designed to fight and win population-centric conflicts." They suggest that the concept is complementary to the domains of land, air, maritime, space and cyberspace and integrates Special Operations capabilities with conventional forces to win population-centric conflicts. From the concept of the human domain and assessing a gap in the Army's capabilities to work with host nations, regional partners and indigenous populations, the seventh WfF as offered intends to integrate "lethal and nonlethal capabilities to assess, shape, deter and influence foreign security environments."

This proposal is not the first attempt to codify a seventh WfF in Army doctrine. In the recent revision of Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, the proposal to introduce a Special Operations WfF was dismissed right away by the Army.[3] Also, the Training and Doctrine Command campaign-of-learning seminar, "How the Army Builds Partners and Capacity to Prevent, Shape and Win" (when debating SOF-conventional force integration) considered the introduction of a seventh WfF, but the working groups could not reach a consensus.[4] Moreover, the Joint doctrine community considered the inclusion of the capstone concept for Joint operations military-activities concepts, of which "engagement" is included, only to dismiss changing the current constructs of military engagement, security cooperation and deterrence in the revision of Joint Publication 3-0, ***Joint Operations***.[5] In this article, I will carry forward portions of this discord and offer rationale for not codifying their proposal for this new WfF.

Policemen with 2nd Battalion, 3rd Afghan National Civil Order Police Brigade, endure a dusty day of training led by members of Special Operations Task Force - South in Kandahar Province, Sept. 22, 2010. *(Photo by SGT Ben Watson)*

Army doctrine defines a WfF as a group of tasks and systems (people, organizations, information and processes) united by a common purpose that commanders use to accomplish missions. The Army's WfF are fundamentally linked to the Joint functions.[6] Joint doctrine defines Joint functions as "related capabilities and activities grouped together to help Joint-force commanders integrate, synchronize and direct Joint operations. Functions that are common to Joint operations at all levels of war fall into six basic groups: [command and control], intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection and sustainment."[7]

This new WfF proposes to group tasks and systems united to manage "lethal and nonlethal capabilities to assess, shape, deter and influence adversaries and the operational environment."[8] However, it does not conclude what that might be.

The arguments oscillate between activities of engagement, building partner capacity, shaping and Special Operations.[9] Of these activities, Special Operations may promote the most parochial response. The primary response would be that lethal and nonlethal capabilities to assess, shape and influence are not unique to SOF, nor do they comprise the core doctrinal tasks of Special Operations.[10] Secondly, those capabilities are not unique to the conditions of Special Operations.[11] The schizophrenic nature of this proposal may suggest there is no solution yet. It may suggest they are leaning toward Special Operations, as the chief of the Army Special Warfare Center and School is leading the effort. Perhaps the real WfF will appear when the forthcoming Army concepts that propose this effort receive validation through experimentation and assessment.

The generals submit that shaping activities required by the future operating environment provide the driver for the integration of general purposes forces and SOF. However, this may present the biggest doctrinal hurdle for codifying a new WfF. The transition from peacetime military engagement activities to major operations and campaigns may not require military commanders ***at all levels*** to synchronize and integrate SOF to accomplish their mission. As presently constructed, the WfF are universally applicable to commanders across both the continuum of conflict and range of military operations.

It is worth noting that the introduction of a Special Operations WfF may not address the organization impediments of SOF-conventional force integration, a stated purpose of this initiative. U.S. Special Operations Command and its Army service component command do not intend to cross-pollinate SOF personnel lower than the divisional headquarters (nor do they have the capacity to do so). Their priority effort of late has been rearranging command relationships of the theater Special Operations commands and the geographic combatant commands.

This is in direct conflict with the practice of the population-centric fight being at brigade-combat-team-and-lower level. This further speaks to this WfF's lack of universal applicability. Currently all commanders employ all WfFs to organize the elements of combat power across both the continuum of conflict and range of military operations. With the current order, and in light of the organizational change efforts the SOF community is now advocating, brigade-and-lower commanders may not routinely be required to integrate SOF capabilities into their operations as they do the other WfFs.

Another supporting idea worth noting is the idea that SOF provides a level of language and regional expertise needed for shaping activities that are not resident in conventional forces. When it comes to language and regional expertise, this may be a significant fallacy of ubiquitous SOF capability and capacity.

Department of Defense policy defines regional expertise as capabilities in one or more foreign languages and includes an understanding of geographic, social and economic issues of a region – and may include unique expertise in one or more countries in a region at the graduate-school level.[12] It lists regional experts as foreign-area officers, attachés, security-assistance officers and political-military officers. It specifically notes SOF as language-capable with regional orientation and "may not possess a high degree of language skill and regional expertise in the area in which they are assigned to operate."[13]

Further compounding this requirement is the complexity of language-capability requirements. The United States recognizes 195 countries in the world, of which there are 200-plus languages (and 6,909 dialects).[14] When considering language skills alone, only 70 languages (seven critical) are recognizable as needed to support national security.[15] By comparison, the most populated force with language training, SOF, is limited to only 10 languages selected and used for initial training.[16]

This challenge of language selection led to SOF trained in the Serbo-Croatian language tasked with missions in support of peacekeeping operations in a predominantly Albanian-speaking Kosovo.[17] However, as DoD policy notes, having language capabilities in SOF does not confer the capability to understand the dynamics of the history and culture of those 195 countries and associated regions. As Professor Andrew Exum, a former Army special operator and adviser to GEN Stan McChrystal and GEN David Petraeus, notes, "If these Soldiers had been immersed in two years of intensive language training and an additional four years of education in the people, tribes, history and cultures of Afghanistan, at the end of those six years, they would still have only a fraction of the local knowledge of an illiterate subsistence farmer native to the region."[18]

There are other arguments offered in other forums. At some point, one of these organizing principles may prove value-added and join the ranks of the other WfFs in Army doctrine. However, I am skeptical that the other services will find enough value to include it in Joint doctrine. I suspect the resolution of this debate will be through decree and significantly linked to codifying bureaucratic tools for SOF capability development in a purported "era of fiscal constraint."[19]

It is not a national secret that USSOCOM would rather the services develop capabilities for SOF using service budgets and regularly seeks to transition Special Operations' particular capabilities to common service use. Nonetheless, the initiative to develop an Army concept to integrate "lethal and nonlethal capabilities, assess, shape, deter and influence foreign security environments" beyond the current Army concept for building partner capacity may be beneficial. That is, if the concept is subjected to validation through experimentation and assessment, its organizing principles may prove value-added and join the ranks of the other WfFs in Army doctrine.

John DeRosa is a Joint warfighting-capabilities analyst on the U.S. Joint Staff. He previously worked in the Strategy, Plans and Policy Directorate of Headquarters Department of the Army. He is a former Armor officer and veteran of the Iraq and Kosovo campaigns. Mr. DeRosa's military schooling includes Intermediate Level Education-Common Core; Command and General Staff College; Joint, Interagency and Multinational Planner's Course; Joint Forces Staff College; Military Intelligence Captains' Career Course; Military Intelligence Officer Transition

Course; and the Armor Officer Basic Course. He received a master's degree in national-security studies and a bachelor's of arts degree in economics from California State University, San Bernardino. He was an Army Fellow to Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Seminar XXI for Assessment Year 11-12.

Notes

[1] Sacolick, Bennet S. MG, and Grigsby, Wayne W. Jr. BG, "Special Operations/Conventional Forces Interdependence: A Critical Role in 'Prevent, Shape, Win.'" ***ARMY***, June 2012.

[2] U.S. Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-13, ***Information Operations***, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Feb. 13, 2006. JP 3-13 notes interrelated dimensions of the information environment as physical, informational and cognitive.

[3] Gleiman, Jan K. LTC, "Operational Art and the Clash of Organizational Cultures: Postmortem on Special Operations as a Seventh Warfighting Function," U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, Oct. 24, 2011.

[4] Army Capability Integration Center, "Event Summary for the How the Army Builds Partners and Capacity to Prevent, Shape and Win Seminar," Feb. 7-10, 2012, http://www.arcic.army.mil/Docs/UQ12-BPC-Event-Summary.pdf.

[5] U.S. Joint Staff, Joint Publication 3-0, ***Joint Operations***, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Aug. 11, 2011.

[6] Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication 3-0, ***Unified Land Operations***, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Oct. 10, 2011.

[7] JP 3-0.

[8] Sacolick and Grigsby.

[9] ARCIC, "Event Summary."

[10] Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-05, ***Special Operations***, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 2006. FM 3-05 defines the Special-Operations core tasks as unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, direct action, special reconnaissance, counterterrorism, military information support operations, civil-affairs operations and counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

[11] U.S. Joint Staff JP 3-05***, Special Operations***. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, April 18, 2011. JP 3-05 defines Special Operations as "operations requiring unique modes of employment, tactical techniques, equipment and training often conducted in hostile, denied or politically sensitive environments and characterized by one or more of the following: time sensitive, clandestine, low visibility, conducted with and/or through indigenous forces, requiring regional expertise and/or a high degree of risk."

[12] Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3126.01, ***Language and Regional Expertise Planning***, Department of Defense, Change 1, April 14, 2006.

[13] Ibid.

[14] U.S. Department of State, "Independent States in the World," accessed at http://www.state.gov/s/inr/rls/4250.htm.

[15] U.S. Department of Defense, "National Security Education Program," accessed at http://www.nsep.gov/students/languages/.

[16] Sunds, Benett, "Selecting Foreign Languages for United States Army Special Operations Forces," master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, June 2006. The 10 languages are listed as Arabic-Modern Standard, Korean, German, Russian, Spanish, French, Persian-Farsi, Indonesian (Bahasa), Tagalog and Mandarin Chinese. Accessed at http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA463798.

[17] Ibid and an interview by the author with a U.S. Army Special Operations officer whose name is withheld under conditions of non-attribution, May 29, 2012.

[18] Exum, Andrew, "Special Forces, or the Danger of Even a Lot of Knowledge," ***World Politics Review***, June 13, 2012. http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12050/abu-muqawama-special-forces-or-the-danger-of-even-a-lot-of-knowledge.

[19] Perhaps it is better to suggest that the Department of Defense will no longer have a blank check to fund unquenchable capability requirements.

Acronym Quick-Scan

ARCIC – Army Capabilities Integration Center
JP – joint publication
SOF – Special Operations Forces
USSCOCOM – U.S. Special Operations Command
WfF – warfighting function

Manuscript deadlines 2013

Edition	Suspense for manuscripts
April-June 2013	Feb. 4, 2013
July-September 2013	May 3, 2013
October-December 2013	Aug. 9, 2013
January-March 2014	Nov. 5, 2013